



Legislative
Services Agency

MINUTES

New Iowans Study Committee Public Hearing

October 6, 2005

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Joe Bolkcom,
Co-chairperson
Senator James Hahn

Representative George Eichhorn
Representative Jodi Tymeson

MEETING IN BRIEF

.....

Organizational staffing provided
by: Tim McDermott, Senior Legal
Counsel, (515) 281-3444

Minutes prepared by: Patty
Funaro, Senior Legal Counsel
(515) 281-3040

- I. Procedural Business.
- II. Panelists.
- III. Public Input.



New Iowans Study Committee Public Hearing

I. Procedural Business.

The New Iowans Study Committee convened its public hearing at the Davenport West High School cafeteria at 6:10 p.m. on October 6, 2005. The public hearing adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

II. Panelists.

Mr. Marco Adasme, New Iowan Center. Mr. Marco Adasme noted the importance of New Iowan Centers in Iowa. He stated that new Iowans are responsible for economic development in the areas in which they settle, by bringing new businesses and cultural diversity. New Iowans also bring increased buying power as well as contributing to the tax base. Employers enjoy the benefits of New Iowan Centers because they reduce turnover among employees by helping families become acclimated. Mr. Adasme noted that in general, new Iowans are reliable, trustworthy employees. He suggested that the General Assembly could help new Iowans by continuing to support New Iowan Centers which provide a variety of services such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and citizenship classes as well as employment assistance.

Ms. Ann Dolan Bishop, ESL Resource Teacher, Davenport Schools. Ms. Ann Dolan Bishop noted that the need for ESL classes has steadily increased over the years and the variety of languages involved has also increased. However, she also noted that since 9-11, with the changes in visa provisions, there has been a decrease in New Iowans and the refugee resettlement center that previously assisted newcomers has closed. Funding for ESL classes is provided for three years, but on the average, a person must study for seven years to be proficient in English. Under the federal No Child Left Behind requirements, more children are remaining in the classes longer based on the end-of-year assessment. Ms. Bishop suggested that additional funding is needed to train additional translators locally and to provide instruction for the entire seven-year period so that students attain proficiency.

Mr. Rich Clewell, Davenport School Board. Mr. Rich Clewell suggested that new Iowans are good for Iowa for a number of reasons. New Iowans bring diversity to the state and in the classroom; this enhances each student's experience and real world education. With regard to economic development, new Iowans bring skills and trades that Iowa needs. Native Iowans are leaving, so new Iowans help to substitute for these losses. Mr. Clewell noted that Iowa ranks 40th among the states in teacher salaries and 36th in per pupil spending and asked if the state is willing to spend less than average on its kids. He stated that new Iowans also increase the tax base. Providing a multicultural, diverse experience for kids will help kids be better equipped in the world.

Ms. Loxi Hopkins, Quad Cities Interfaith (QCI). Ms. Loxi Hopkins noted that new Iowans expand the population and help increase the receipt of federal funds. Each year, immigrants infuse \$10 billion into the economy. Immigrants bring diversity through new businesses, talents and skills, and arts and music. She suggested that barriers, such as the English-only



law, need to be removed because these types of initiatives keep immigrants from coming to Iowa. She noted that new Iowans deserve protection in the workplace because they are more vulnerable. Ms. Hopkins noted her disappointment with the General Assembly's failure to pass the Dream Act. She also stressed the need to overcome falsities such as the untruth that immigrants do not pay taxes. In fact, she noted that while immigrants pay taxes, they are not always eligible for programs that are paid for through these taxes, such as Medicare.

Ms. Kate Karacay, Network Against Human Trafficking. Ms. Kate Karacay stated that she had spent the afternoon with Ms. Noreen Gosch, the mother of Johnny Gosch, who disappeared during his paper route as a young boy in 1982, and who is now believed to have been kidnapped as part of a human trafficking ring out of Nebraska. Ms. Karacay noted that there are many types of human trafficking, including sex trafficking and those used to provide factory and farm workers. Ms. Karacay noted that the U.S. Department of Justice's most recent estimate of victims of human trafficking in the United States is 18,000, while the Central Intelligence Agency in 1999 estimated that there were 50,000 victims in the United States. She voiced her support for legislation to make human trafficking a crime in the state, because this would assist authorities in their own jurisdictions. Approximately nine states, including California, New York, and Texas, have enacted human trafficking legislation. Ms. Karacay noted that victims of human trafficking suffer lifelong emotional and psychological harm from their experiences.

Mr. Paul Lensmeyer, Alcoa Employees and Community Credit Union. Mr. Paul Lensmeyer noted that the immigrants with which his businesses in Bettendorf, Davenport, and Muscatine work are mainly Latino/Hispanic. He discussed three issues: trust, language, and lack of knowledge of financial services. With regard to trust, Mr. Lensmeyer noted that approximately 50 percent of immigrants are "unbanked" and keep their money at home. This is based on lack of trust in institutions developed from their former country of residence. Language is a problem, because even though interpreters are available, this is not ongoing. Out of Mr. Lensmeyer's 80 employees, nine bilingual employees have been hired as the result of a concerted effort to increase this service to customers. It is difficult to hire bilingual employees because they are in great demand among a variety of employers. Many immigrants lack knowledge of basic financial services. While some have checking accounts, they do not often open other types of accounts. This is based again on the lack of trust that many immigrants had in the financial institutions of their country of origin.

Mr. Lensmeyer suggested that bilingual staff are necessary. He noted that his institution has attempted outreach through seminars on mortgage buying, but these have not always been successful. Mr. Lensmeyer noted that housing is generally affordable in Iowa, but that immigrants generally do not have credit, money for a down payment, or a long employment history. He stated that the Iowa Finance Authority, the New Iowan Centers, and Workforce Development provide valuable services to immigrants. He suggested that the General Assembly help develop trust in financial services by continuing to provide basic financial



New Iowans Study Committee Public Hearing

education through these agencies and locations. He encouraged promotion of the New Iowan Centers.

III. Public Input.

Mr. Glenn Leach. Mr. Glenn Leach noted that his father stormed the beaches at Normandy and his father-in-law came to work in the mines in Illinois, and that we owe our own presence in this country to immigrants. Immigrants bring wealth to this country in many ways, including by founding businesses that generate revenue. He supports ESL and noted that even though he opposed the English-only law, part of the provisions of that law were to enhance ESL funding, which has never materialized. While it is important that students are provided with ESL training, parents should also be included. If parents do not also learn the language, this creates a reversal of family roles, with parents being dependent upon their children to function in society.

Ms. Betty Yohnkce, Generations Area Agency on Aging. Ms. Betty Yohnkce spoke about the issues of immigrant seniors, mainly Vietnamese and Hispanic. She noted that the majority of these seniors do not have jobs or health insurance and, therefore, allow their health to deteriorate. Some are provided health care through community health centers. She noted that some of the programs offering assistance to immigrants, including the Davenport resettlement office, have been closed or had funding reduced. Ms. Yohnkce advocated for increased bilingual assistance and job training.

Ms. Laura Raya, Diocese of Davenport. Ms. Laura Raya noted that many times it takes years for immigrants to resettle and be reunited with family members (on average, reuniting takes from two to 14 years). The diocese assists immigrants in resettlement, especially with paperwork. She advocated respecting the dignity of all people in order to produce effective members of society. She supports the Dream Act because the majority of immigrant students grow up in the United States and attend schools here, but are then unable to continue their education. Allowing these students to continue their education by paying in-state tuition only benefits the state by providing resources for the future. The population of the state would shrink by 4 percent annually if there were not immigrants, which would result in fewer workers and fewer federal funds being drawn down.

Ms. Linda Greenlee. Ms. Linda Greenlee provided a statement from Senator Maggie Tinsman, who was unable to attend due to a prior commitment with the National Episcopal Church in Memphis. In the statement, Senator Tinsman noted that she totally supports new Iowans. This state and country are populated by those of other lands and living among people with differences makes us all more tolerant. Iowa is an aging state and welcomes new families and their children. The Committee will work to provide opportunities to welcome new Iowans into the mainstream.

Ms. Ann Grove, World Relief. Ms. Ann Grove noted that she works in Moline, Illinois, in resettling refugees, but the funding for resettlement on the Iowa side of the river is no longer



available. She hopes that this will change. Training for culturally competent health care exists, which would help health care providers and employers, but funding is not available.

Ms. Nancy Razo, QCI. Ms. Nancy Razo, a 2004 graduate of Davenport West High School, noted her support of the Dream Act. She graduated with honors and applied to the University of Northern Iowa, but because in-state tuition is not available to her, she is not presently continuing her education and feels frustrated because she would like to be in school. She asked for support so that she could return more to the United States than she already has.

Ms. Ann Marie Tessier, ESL Teacher, Davenport Community School District. Ms. Ann Marie Tessier noted that translators are very valuable at school because they help families adjust and help parents be involved. She stressed that the parent contact is most important in this dynamic. Additionally, translators should be provided with fair and more competitive wages so that they are not drawn away from the schools to more lucrative jobs.

Rev. Michael Swartz, QCI. Rev. Michael Swartz stated that churches have assisted in the resettlement of many refugees, including those from Cuba, Bosnia, Haiti, and Vietnam. The resources available to the Diocese of Davenport have been reduced due to challenges of world relief. Bureaucratic barriers need to be reduced to provide assistance.

Ms. Rachel Carlson, Junior at the University of Iowa. Ms. Rachel Carlson advocated for a state human trafficking law. Without such a law, Iowa will continue to tolerate abuses against immigrants and non-Iowans.

Ms. Hue Nguyen. Ms. Hue Nguyen expressed concern for her family through an interpreter. Her grandchild became sick and the child's school instructed Ms. Nguyen to take the child to the doctor. Ms. Nguyen took her granddaughter to the community health center, but because of a shortage of doctors, the child had to wait one week for an appointment, during which time she did not attend school. In interactions with the school, Ms. Nguyen became afraid that if she did not provide her grandchild with health care, the child would be taken away from her. Ms. Nguyen has been in the United States for 16 years, but because of problems with language and culture, she still feels as though the American culture is new to her.

Officer Pimi Canas, Davenport Police Department. Officer Pimi Canas asked that someone assist Ms. Nguyen with her problem and Representative Cindi Winckler volunteered to do so. Officer Canas noted that he joined the Marine Corps and was able to obtain a Veterans Administration grant to attend college in Illinois, but this is not available in Iowa. He encouraged the members of the General Assembly to make such grants available in Iowa because education is so important and that is what makes this country so great. Officer Canas noted that in answering calls door-to-door, he has seen the whole spectrum of society and that what each person can do is based on how they treat other people. He noted that it is important for people to reach out and used the example of financial institutions reaching out to help immigrants plan for their futures as a step in the right direction.



New Iowans Study Committee Public Hearing

Rev. Jacque McCoy, QCI. Rev. Jacque McCoy noted that although she is African-American, people often mistook her for a person of Spanish decent and spoke Spanish to her. She said that it occurred to her that if she were Latino, her son might not be able to get in-state tuition to attend college and might not have all of the opportunities that he does have. She noted that not long ago, African-Americans also were not provided with all of the benefits available. She asked that lawmakers and others make Iowa a welcome place for everyone.

Ms. Latessa Laso, Mother of Nancy Razo. Ms. Latessa Laso offered, through an interpreter, to provide her services to teach Spanish to children in exchange for allowing her daughter to attend college as a resident of Iowa.

Ms. Rosa Knapp, Translations Unlimited. Ms. Rosa Knapp noted that her translation service provides 26 languages in the Quad Cities alone. Through their other offices in five states, they provide services in 217 languages. She asked how others would like to live in a country where they do not understand you. Ms. Knapp is fluent in five languages and noted that in Europe and other areas of the world, children learn languages other than their native tongue. She said that she is a courtroom interpreter and spends every day in court. She has helped not only with crimes, but with deportations. Many times people are deported and return because their children are American-born. They work hard, but if they are caught a third time, they are subject to serving time in prison. She noted that in her own life, coming from Peru, she has gone from being rich to being poor. She now has her own business even though someone told her she could not do it.

Final Meeting. Co-chairperson Bolkcom thanked all of the participants and noted that the final meeting of the Committee will be held in Des Moines on a date yet to be announced so that the members can discuss what they have learned and make recommendations.

3549IC